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AUTHOR Sylvester, Nancy
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ABSTRACT

The responsibilities of serving as a certified, national parliamentarian are both time-consuming and rewarding, and include three areas: national conventions, board meetings, and being "on call." Careful organization of all pertinent documents and preparation are essential to success for the convention parliamentarian, who also serves as support for the organization's president. Sitting in on organizational board meetings mainly involves ensuring that the board follows proper procedures, while being "on call" involves preparing materials for meetings, giving advice, and solving unexpected problems. All three areas provide challenges, as does establishing a fee structure. However, although it requires a great deal of time and energy, this second profession can prove to be a lucrative and interesting addition to the speech professional. (DF)

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SERVING AS NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN: OUT OF THE CLASSROOM AND INTO THE CONVENTION HALL

Nancy Sylvester

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SERVING AS NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIAN: OUT OF THE CLASSROOM AND INTO THE CONVENTION HALL

by Nancy Sylvester RPP, CP, Associate Professor of Speech, Rock Valley College

As a junior speech major in college, I took a one-hour course that would have a major impact on my future. That course was Speech 251, Parliamentary Procedure. The course and subject excited me. For the next nine years I continued my interest in the subject on a very limited basis. I did a few presentations on parliamentary procedure in the community and answered parliamentary questions from community leaders.

I soon drew the conclusion that a little bit of knowledge in this field can be dangerous and decided that I needed more knowledge. I applied for a one semester sabbatical. Rock Valley College (RVC) is a community college and this sabbatical supported the philosophy of the college by helping attain one of its objectives "To provide a program of community services designed to meet community needs through the most effective use of college human and physical resources." While on the sabbatical I worked in six areas: 1) I studied parliamentary procedure. I did this through printed material, an advanced correspondence course, conferences and study groups. 2) I attempted certification as a parliamentarian. While on sabbatical leave I became a Certified Parliamentarian through the American Institute of Parliamentarian and a Registered Professional Parliamentarian through the National Association of Parliamentarians. I am the only Registered or Certified Parliamentarian in the Rockford, Illinois, community which numbers approximately a quarter of a million people. 3) I developed a short course for Adult Continuing Education. I still teach this two and one-half hour course. 4) I surveyed and analyzed the voluntary boards in Rockford to determine their knowledge and needs in parliamentary procedure. 5) I put together a booklet to use in presentations. That booklet has proved to be very helpful. In its second printing and copyright, it is jointly owned by Rock Valley College and me. I chose that avenue because the college agreed to print the booklets free for me and I could distribute them as I chose. 6) I gave presentations on parliamentary procedure to Rockford boards and organizations. I did thirty presentations to over five hundred people.

The purpose of this paper is to explain my work as a National Parliamentarian including what that job entails, the services I provide, the fees charged, and how I integrate that with my full time job as an Associate Professor of Speech.

In 1980 I was contacted by the American Society of Women Accountants (ASWA) to serve as their National Parliamentarian and continue in that capacity now. They had acquired my name through the National Association of Parliamentarians. In 1982 I was contacted by the Region V Director of the National Association of Insurance Women, Internationl (NAIW) to serve as parliamentarian at their 1983 Regional Conference. The Regional Director acquired my name from a parliamentarian in her home community of Minneapolis/St. Paul. They wanted a parliamentarian from Rockford because the Conference that year was in Rockford. I have served as their Regional Parliamentarian ever since, traveling each year to their Regional Conference. At that first Region V Conference I met the National President-Elect of NAIW. She asked me to serve as her National Parliamentarian during her term of office and so did her successor. Suddenly I found myself very busy, with the responsibilities as National and Regional Parliamentarian added to my teaching load

The job of National Parliamentarian really includes three areas of responsibility: National Convention, board meetings, and being "on call." The first and most obvious is to serve at the National Convention. Roberts explains the role of the convention parliamentarian:

> During the period of preparation and while the convention is in progress, he should serve as the principal advisor to the president, the officers and the committee chairman regarding management of the convention as it relates to the actual transaction of business (Roberts 507).

Preparation is the key to success for the convention parliamentarian. For each of the organizations for which I work I have a three inch thick ring notebook. In it I keep all the necessary documents including all of the rules of the organization (Bylaws, Standing Rules, Convention Rules, etc.), agendas and minutes from present and past conventions and board meetings, a script of the present and/or past convention, correspondence I have had with them, fee information and any other information important to this group. Before and during the convention, this notebook stays always by my side. A list of the material that should be provided the parliamentarian is listed in the article "Convention Know-How" (Capone 6-7).

Before the convention I have worked with the appropriate persons on bylaw amendments, convention agenda, convention script, and convention rules so that I know that all of these are in proper form before I arrive at the convention. Upon arrival I immediately contact the president. I am then briefed on any last minute problems. Meetings with various committee chairman and officers are usually scheduled for me before the convention. These usually include the Credentials Chairman, Resolutions Committee Chairman, Secretary and any others who may have questions and/or problems. Miriam Butcher's article "A Parliamentarian's Preconvention Preparation" would serve helpful for someone preparing for their first convention (39-40). Also, Mrs. C.R. Capone's article "Convention Know-How" would help the new convention parliamentarian in the preparation process (6-7).

During the convention I work closely with the president. I sit next to the president during all business meetings. This is a must. All contact with the president during the meeting must be as discrete as possible. Recently one presiding officer at the end of the conference jokingly commented that all of her skirts were now longer on one side from my getting her attention during meetings. During the meetings all necessary documents must be at the fingertips of the parliamentarian. One of the great time savers is to try to second guess any potential problem on the agenda so one is prepared with the answer. I also brief the president on these so she too is prepared.

A convention is more than just a series of business meetings. My role outside the meetings varies according to the group and the problems the group faces that year. At the beginning of the convention I sit down with the president and go over the schedule of the convention so I am clear where I need to be at all times. The response from the president varies from "By my side until I sound the final gravel" to "After the business meetings each morning you are free for the rest of the day." Most organizations like to have me at the social functions. This creates a relaxed environment for the members to ask questions. Many small fires have been put out at social functions.

One of the most important roles of serving as national parliamentarian is that of supporter of the president. When one works with the president throughout the year, she can get to know his or her strengths and weaknesses. One can be very supportive and help reduce the unwarranted insecurities, as well as detect weaknesses. The role of the convention parliamentarian as the president's "security blanket" is discussed in an article in the National Parliamentarian by Dorothy Connell, RP (22-23).

While serving as Convention Parliamentarian is the most visible part of being the National Parliamentarian, it is by no means the complete job. The second area of responsibility is sitting in on board meetings. This too varies from one organization to another. With one organization I am seldom in board meetings, usually asked to come when they know ahead of time there will be problems. The other organization asks me to attend all board meetings, which means two additional trips a year.

The major thrust of my work at board meetings is to guide the board so they follow proper procedure, thus preventing potential problems for the organization. In a national organization many important decisions are made at the board level. Thus the presence of a parliamentarian at the board meetings is as important as her presence at the convention meetings

The position of National Parliamentarian obviously implies work at the national convention and board meetings but less obviously includes being "on call" throughout the year. This usually involves work in three areas. First I help prepare material for board or convention meetings, such as bylaw proposals. This work varies from receiving a finished bylaw proposal to review, change if necessary, and send back, to a call from the president or bylaw chairman telling me what she wants done, then requesting me to write it up. Another example of work in this area is helping to prepare convention rules.

The second area of being "on call" is receiving calls for advice. When the president is not sure how to answer a member's question or a local chapter is having a parliamentary problem and needs advice, I get a phone call. When a national bylaws chairman is having problems with local chapter bylaws or an officer does not know how to interpret a portion of the bylaws, I get a call. Sometimes these calls are easy to answer; other times research and a later response is necessary.

The third area of being "on call" is solving unexpected problems. The best example of this occurred last spring. ASWA had for the first time in its almost fifty year history a contested election for president-elect and for a board position. The bylaws call for a mail vote. I spent significant time preparing the ballot, determing the best balloting procedure, and advising on the election process. These long hours of preparation and attention to details were not in vain because the election was extremely close (eleven votes difference in the two candidates for National President-elect). Proper procedure became a life saver.

Being "on call" is a very challenging part of being a parliamentarian. It is also very frustrating because the long distance calls frequently come at "less than desirable" times.

Each of three areas of being a National Parliamentarian (Convention Parliamentarian, advising at Board Meetings, and being "on call") presents its own challenges. In performing these jobs, I find myself providing a variety of services. While the services vary with each organization, there are some common aspects of each.

In all three organizations for which I work, the presiding officer uses a script for each business meeting. The script states verbatim what the presiding officer and any other planned speaker will say during the business meeting. It is an excellent device for keeping the meeting flowing smoothly. Even the most inexperienced, flustered presiding officer can follow the script. The presiding officer uses the previous year's script as a basis for preparing the current year's script. Since it is imperative that the script be accurate, I usually review it before the convention, suggesting necessary changes or improved phrasing. Changes are made in the script right up to the last minute. A copy of the script is usually distributed to key officers and board members making presentations. During the meeting I follow the script with the presiding officer, making sure that in the excitement of the moment nothing is omitted. A great side benefit of the script is that it serves as an excellent aid to the secretary in writing the minutes.

If the board members and the officers keep in touch with the membership, they will be apprised of any motions or amendments that a member is planning to offer. When I am visible to the members, I too find out about these in advance of the meeting, and help the members write their motion or amendment in proper form, saving valuable time during the business meeting. If the motion is difficult to handle or if the presiding officer is not well versed in parliamentary procedure, I frequently script the amending of the motion for the presiding officer. Then when the member makes the motion, I hand the presiding officer a copy of the script for handling that motion. Last fall at a convention, I was advised of a possible amendment to be proposed. I talked to the chapter contemplating the motion. We wrote the amendment as they wanted it written. Since it became a substitute amendment to a proposed bylaw amendment, and the handling of a substitute amendment is very unusual and difficult, I wrote a script for the president. When the member went to the microphone to make her substitute motion, I handed the script to the president and a sometimes awkward procedure went very smoothly.

Another service of the parliamentarian that can assist in helping the convention run smoothly is working closely with committees. Credentials, Rules, Bylaws, and Resolutions are just a few of the committees with which the parliamentarian should meet. Sometimes in working with a committee one finds that they are not working in the most efficient manner. At these times the parliamentarian can be an impetus for change. One of the organizations I work with has for years not been using the Recommendations Committee to its fullest. When I first worked with them, the Recommendations Committee did little more than receive some of the motions/resolutions and then present them, as is, on the convention floor. At their most recent convention, following my instructions the Recommendations Committee received motions, spent hours putting them in the proper, most desirable form, and voted on whether to present them on the convention floor with a positive or a negative recommendation. The time spent by this committee was justified. When the three motions they prepared went to the floor, they were discussed and disposed of quickly--due to clarity, people could make informed decisions.

One of the most difficult jobs for many members of organizations is preparing proposed changes in the bylaws. I always work closely with the bylaws chairman or the president and whoever else is working with bylaws. The usual procedure is that they tell me what they want and I write the bylaw amendment for them. I have found the best form is to write the motion as it will be stated in the meeting. Then on the left side of the paper I copy the present wording and opposite that on the right side I put the proposed wording. In both of these I underline the change. Then at the bottom I put the rationale so that the members can understand why this is proposed. Most of the time I do not write the rationale; I leave that up to the bylaws chairman. The most important thing to remember in rewriting bylaws is to keep the new wording consistent with the rest of the bylaws and very easy for the members to understand.

Because of my expertise in both parliamentary procedures and communications I frequently teach workshops and seminars at conventions. I have worked with the American Society of Women Accountants to rewrite their Leadership Course Book and for years have taught that as a course which includes parliamentary procedure and skills in communication and leadership. This fall I also taught for them an Advanced Leadership Course. Since the Leadership Course had been taught for years, there were many members who wanted additional training, pointing to the need for the Advanced Leadership Course. At other conventions, I have taught workshops and seminars on both parlimentary procedure and communication skills. When teaching parliamentary procedure either by itself or as a part of a more extensive program, I always use my Basics of Parliamentary Procedures booklet that I wrote during my sabbatical leave. As one can see, the services of a National Parliamentarian can be very extensive. I believe that the more varied services one can offer, the more she becomes indispensable to the organization.

One of the most difficult aspects of my work is determining my fee schedule. The financial aspects of the job can be very challenging. I always make it very clear from the beginning that fees and expenses are separate issues. All expenses, including long-distance calls, are completely paid for by the hiring organization.

Fees charged vary greatly as is shown in the two separate studies. According to Darwin Patnods, Ph.D. in "Results of the 1984 Survey of Certified Professional Parliamentarians" the average hourly fee is $38.14 (1-6). The hourly fees charged in this survey ranged from ten dollars to one hundred dollars. It should be remembered that this survey was given to Certified Professional Parliamentarians. The American Institute of Parliamentarians has two levels of certification: the Certified Parliamentarian (CP) and the Certified Professional Parliamentarian (CPP). It is therefore possible that the fee would be lower if the study included both levels of certified parliamentarians. The average number of hours worked by the respondents to the survey over a period of a year was 172.9 but forty-one percent of those hours were donated without charge. Of the fifty-five respondents, twenty-two were "educated beyond a master's degree." Those who were educated beyond a master's degree had an average fee of $40.00 and those not educated beyond a master's degree had an average fee of $31.94. One other interesting point made in the paper was the comparison of average hourly fee to past studies. In the 1982 survey the average fee was $34.20 and in the 1980 survey the average fee was $29.00.

The second study surveying fees focused upon members of the National Association of Parliamentarians (Inman 5-6). This organization has only one level of certification and that is the Registered Professional Parliamentarian. This survey, by the Public Relations Committee of the National Association of Parlimentarians,

was done in February, 1980, and had 265 respondents. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents charge for convention work on an hourly basis. The fees range from $10 to $60 per hour, with a majority charging between $20 and $25 per hour. Four percent of the respondents charge by the meeting--their fees range from $25 to $50. Fifty-two percent of the respondents charge a per diem fee ranging from $25 to $300, with a majority charging $75 to $100. Finally, eleven percent of the respondents negotiate the fee and six percent volunteer time to non-profit or member's own organizations.

In determining a fee structure there are three approaches that I have tried. Each of these possibilities has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. When charging by the hour, the fee should be applicable whether on a phone conference with an officer, in a convention meeting, or at a social function one is attending because such attendance has been requested. There are many advantages to this fee structure. One is only asked to do important jobs because it is profligate for them to pay such high fees for clerical work. If one puts in a very long day, there is a monetary reward for that fifteen hour day. Consequently, I have found that I make more money when charging by the hour. However, the greatest disadvantage of being paid by the hour is that most organizations are not in a financial situation to be able to afford an hourly rate with repeated long days.

When charging solely by the job, one always knows ahead of time what she will make for a job. This eliminates the tedious job of keeping track of the hours worked. With a set fee, the greatest disadvantage is that sometimes the clients requests more work than they would otherwise. They ask one to work very late or to do jobs that could be done by someone else.

The fee structure I use frequently is a combination of the fee by the hour and by the job. When I serve as National or Regional parliamentarian I work with the group throughout the year as well as at their national or regional conference. During the year, I charge my hourly fee for any work I do for them. This includes conferences with officers, which occurs frequently. When it is time for a board meeting or the convention, I have worked out a set fee for that job. This helps the organization budget for the board meetings and conferences. Each convention is different, so be sure to find out the kind of hours expected of you before you determine your fee.

While determining fees is a challenge, it is also rewarding. "Clearly the most comfortable, satisfying and uncomplicated role as parliamentarian is being employed as a knowledgeable professional to serve the needs of an organization of which one is not a member. It is also pleasant to contemplate that one's expertise will be appropriately compensated" (Wolfarth 23).

Adding the job of parliamentarian to that of college professor makes for a busy schedule. There are many problems in integrating the two jobs. They are some of the same problems faced by those who do consulting with businesses.

In the beginning of this paper I referred to my sabbatical leave granted by Rock Valley College. That was a very positive aspect of integrating teaching and parliamentary procedures. It is through that sabbatical that I was able to, in a very short period of time, get much of the background needed for serving as a national and regional parliamentarian.

As a community college, Rock Valley College is very interested in serving the needs of the community. One of the ways RVC does that is to provide the community with experts in certain fields. As the only certified or registered parliamentarian in the Rockford community, I am meeting a need in the community. Therefore the administrators at the college are supportive of my involvement in this venture. If someone in the community needs help in parliamentary procedure, Rock Valley College is where they must turn.

While the administrators are supportive, I must still stay within college policy. Therefore, integrating travel and teaching is extremely challenging. I usually travel approximately six times a year. The reason I can travel that much is that three of those jobs are during the summer. I do not teach summer school which frees me for the necessary travel. One of those jobs is before the beginning of the second semester. That leaves one job during the fall semester and one or two during the spring semester. I use personal leave days for those jobs that occur during the semester. Therefore, one needs to be careful to schedule jobs that don't call her out of the same classes too frequently. A cooperative administration certainly is helpful in this area.

There is an advantage to being a parliamentarian that I have not yet mentioned. I have not mentioned it because it is not intellectural by nature, but it is a clear, distinct advantage. As a professional parliamentarian I get to travel literally all over the United States. When I travel, I stay at very nice hotels and usually eat at some fine restaurants. I usually work most of the time and thus see very little of the city I am visiting; nevertheless, it is still a change of pace and a change of jobs and therefore an invigorating experience. I have, for example, been to Tulsa, Oklahoma three times and except for the hotel complex I have only seen the part of Tulsa I could see while jogging at six in the morning, or riding to and from the airport. Yet, I enjoyed the Tulsa trip very much.

When I took Speech 251, Parliamentary Procedure, as a junior in college, little did I know how significantly it would affect my life. I never would have guessed that years later it would become a second profession for me. It is very challenging, time consuming and lucrative. Furthermore, I have met some very interesting people and made friends all over the country. It is a natural second profession for a speech professor. Remember, if you don't keep up on parliamentary law, you will soon forget the intricacies of its application. If you don't use it, you lose it!

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